



**Survey, Assessment, and
Recommendations for the
Assistance to Firefighters
Grant Program**

Final Report

**Prepared for the
U.S. Fire Administration
Federal Emergency Management Agency**

**USDA's Executive Potential Program Team 6
January 31, 2003**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of our team would like to thank the staff of the Federal Emergency Management's U.S. Fire Administration for their sponsorship and support of our Executive Potential Program team project. We hope that our efforts have assisted the USFA with valuable information about the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program to identify and assess fire departments which need assistance in procuring the resources needed to protect the health and safety of the public and members of those departments. We also hope that this assessment will provide your organization with enough data to continue to support this program and your mission of reducing loss of life and economic losses due to fire and fire related emergencies, through your leadership, advocacy, coordination and support.

We also want to acknowledge our management, which has recognized our individual contributions and allowed us to develop professionally through active participation in the Executive Potential Program.

FOREWORD

Firefighters across the United States have been lobbying Congress for 20 years in order to obtain federal funding for needed equipment and resources. Most U.S. fire departments have long been understaffed, under equipped and under trained. Like their police department colleagues, who have received funds, they believed assistance at the federal level was necessary to bring fire fighter support services up to 21st century standards.

In 2001, for the first time ever, Congress approved a two-year authorization providing financial grants to fire departments. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program's objective is to identify fire departments, which need assistance in procuring tools and resources to protect the health and safety of the public and members of those departments.

Our goal as a team participating in the 2002-2003 United States Department of Agriculture's Leadership Development Academy Executive Potential Program is to assess the quality and effectiveness of the program's grant process. We also wanted to provide the Federal Emergency Management Agency's United States Fire Administration with a comprehensive evaluation of the process by providing both qualitative and quantitative measures, which reflect the positive impacts of these funds in meeting the agency's stated mission.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of our Executive Potential Program Team Project is to assess the effectiveness of the United States Fire Administration's Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program. Our aim is to provide the USFA with a comprehensive evaluation of the program by providing both qualitative and quantitative measures, which reflect the positive impacts of these funds in meeting the agency's stated mission.

Based on the information gathered from the on-line survey, the following recommendations are provided to the United States Fire Administration as possible means for improving the efficiency of the grant program and the customer satisfaction level of those fire departments utilizing the program.¹

- Additional training in the grant application process is recommended to ensure all eligible and interested parties are afforded the opportunity to submit a complete and comprehensive application.
- Consider seeking out those departments with survey responses that indicated a need for further training (if appropriate training could be offered via teleconference or other venue).
- Continue to survey program participants. Initial findings from grant recipients are extremely positive. Ongoing collection and analysis is likely to further support program goals and provide continued insight into fire department needs and program modification requirements.
- Review the matching funds requirements. Differing needs and budgets among rural versus urban fire departments and large versus small may be placing undue burden on some departments and could inhibit participation.
- Direct funds toward bringing more stations into compliance.
- Study the size/location/grant location for those stations for who the grant didn't make a significant impact.

Overall, the results of the survey and our analysis reflect that the USFA Grant to Firefighters program was highly effective in improving the readiness and capabilities of firefighters across the nation. Many positive comments on the programs value and success were received during the survey process. In addition, the grant application process was streamlined and simplified by USFA during the FY 2002 cycle to assist future applicants.

¹ This assessment is limited to the responses derived from FY2001 grant recipients as of November 14, 2002.

BACKGROUND

Firefighters across the United States have been lobbying Congress for 20 years in order to obtain federal funding for needed equipment and resources. Most U.S. fire departments have long been understaffed, under equipped and under trained. Like their police department colleagues, who have received funds, they believed assistance at the federal level was necessary to bring fire fighter support services up to 21st century standards.²

In 2001, for the first time ever, Congress approved a two-year authorization providing financial grants to fire departments. During the application period of 30 days (April 1, 2002 – May 2, 2001) FEMA responded to over 11,000 telephone calls with grant-related questions and 8,615 e-mail requests for grant writing assistance. When the application period expired 31,295 grant applications had been received from 18,915 fire departments. Applications were scored and ranked against pre-established criteria by a peer review panel.

The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program's objective is to identify fire departments which need assistance in procuring tools and resources to protect the health and safety of the public and members of those departments. Applicants to the grant program must meet the criteria of a "fire department of a State."³

In support of the grant program, FEMA/USFA created an office with oversight responsibilities for this effort. During the first year of the program, potential recipients applied for assistance in six primary categories:

- Fire Prevention
- Firefighting Equipment
- Personal Protective Equipment
- Training
- Firefighting Vehicles
- Wellness and Fitness

² Report on the Assistance to Fire Fighters Grant Program for FY2001 (October 9,2001)

³ A "fire department of State" is defined as an agency or organization that has a formally recognized arrangement with a State, local or tribal authority (city, county, parish, fire district, township, town or other governing body) to provide fire suppression for a population within a fixed geographical area.

In 2001, over \$96 million in grants were distributed to 1900 applicants from 46 states and 3 territories. A detailed breakout of the category distribution follows:

Table 1: Grant Category Award Breakout

Category	Grants to Local Career Departments		Grants to Local Volunteer/Combination Departments		Grants to Fire Service Organizations ⁴		Totals	
	#	Amount	#	Amount	#	Amount	#	Amount
Fire Prevention	72	\$4,053,961	137	\$5,017,524	31	\$4,590,228	240	\$13,661,713
Firefighting Equipment	96	\$631,688	308	\$8,487,776			404	\$14,919,464
Personal Protective Equipment	176	\$14,566,894	530	\$19,569,915			706	\$34,136,809
Training	31	\$2,019,768	129	\$3,179,588			160	\$5,199,356
Firefighting Vehicles	52	\$6,507,451	156	\$13,905,155			208	\$20,412,606
Wellness and Fitness	53	\$4,327,181	115	\$3,929,539			168	\$8,256,720
TOTALS	480	\$37,906,943	1,375	\$54,089,497	31	\$4,590,228	1,886	\$96,586,668

⁴ Grants went to national fire prevention and safety campaigns, State and National burn associations, foundations, associations and programs focused on high-risk populations, and local prevention initiatives.

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

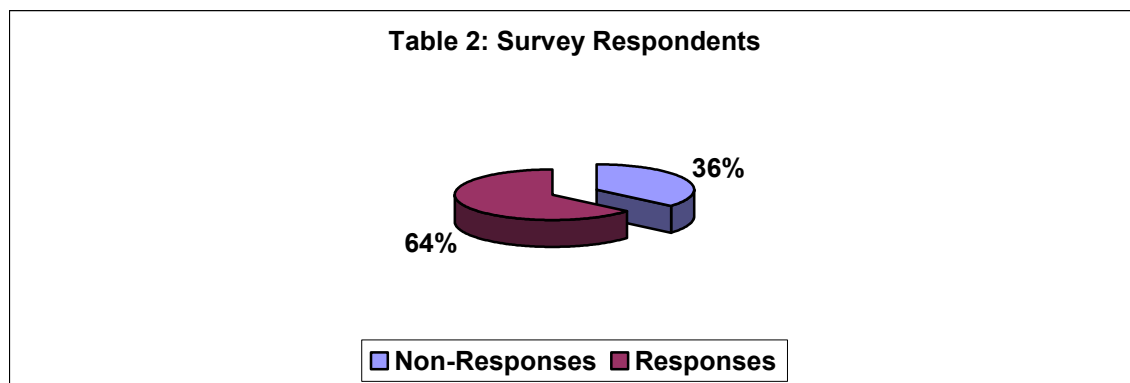
USFA management believed it was critical to obtain feedback on the Firefighters Grant Program's success. The program was new to the agency in fiscal year 2001, support staff to administer it was limited, and efforts prior to the survey were focused on development of the application and recipient selection procedures. While USFA knew the departments that applied, they were not certain about those that did not apply. USFA needed to assess if they were reaching everyone in need and, if not, why not and how could the process be corrected? Through quantitative and qualitative measures, USFA hoped to identify the success stories and any positive impacts. Additionally, USFA needed to determine if funds were being provided in the appropriate resource areas -- were the greatest needs being addressed?

Purpose and Need of the Study

To assess the impact of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant program -- through quantitative and qualitative measures, to identify the success stories, impacts and challenges. To determine if funds were being provided in the appropriate resource areas.

Design of the Study

With the objective of determining the overall effectiveness of the grant program, the team developed and administered a survey to the recipients of the first grant cycle, which began in FY 2001. Survey questions were organized based on grant assistance categories and respondents were encouraged to answer those questions that applied to their particular departments. The survey was sent both electronically or by mail to 1,564 non-discretionary grant recipients.



One hundred percent of the non-discretionary grantees were surveyed. It was originally anticipated that received responses would range from 50% - 90% of the grantees.

Ultimately, over 64% of those recipients surveyed responded to the survey.

SURVEY PROCEDURE AND TECHNIQUE

The process for developing and conducting the survey is briefly described below:

1. Coordinating and finalizing the project definition with USFA. Team members met with USFA management to determine the scope and definition of the team project, what resources could be applied to the project over its life cycle, and what results would be expected.
2. Conducting Research. The team conducted research on two key areas: (a) what survey devices or techniques could be employed, and (b) ways in which these could be tied to specific FEMA or Firefighter Administration goals and objectives.
3. Data Collection. The team determined the methodology to be used in conveying the survey questions to the recipients and how responses would be collected and summarized.
4. Survey Question Development. The team worked with the USFA staff to develop questions for each of the grant categories (e.g., fire prevention, firefighting equipment, personal protective equipment, training, firefighting vehicles, and wellness and fitness) that would result in producing data that would assist USFA management in assessing the grants program.
5. Survey Vehicle Development. The team submitted final survey questions to USFA's contract support for incorporation to a web site that would be used to deliver the survey and serve as a repository for survey responses.
6. Survey Instrument. The survey instrument enabled our team to gather and provide the USFA with direct recipient feedback on the overall effectiveness of the Grant Program and application procedures. The survey response period was open for approximately 60 days. During that time, 999 of a possible 1,564 grant recipients responded to the survey, or almost 64%. Of those responding, 542 provided narrative comments on the grant program and survey application process. Response rate to the survey was extremely high, providing a statistically significant sample size.
7. Survey Distribution. The survey was distributed to all 1,564 non-discretionary grant recipients. The team utilized an on-line survey to gather results. Grant respondents were notified of the survey URL and asked to respond according based on the grant category from which they were awarded funds. The electronic survey greatly reduced the analysis time required by the team. Paper surveys were provided for those departments who were unable to gain access online.
8. Compiling the Results. Survey responses were provided either electronically or in hard copy to a USFA contractor. The contractor entered the results into a database, allowing for analysis of each of the survey items. After responses had been accumulated, USFA and the team members determined that a significant sample (65%) was available for analysis.

9. *Interpreting and Relating Results.* Using item analysis data as well as anecdotal comment review, the team identified trends and significant findings associated with the impact of grant funds. These findings are highlighted in the Report.

10. *Final Report.* The final report addresses the overall outcome of the project and provides USFA with a separate summary analysis of the survey responses from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

11. *Future Recommendations.* This report includes several recommendations for using the survey, or its baseline data, by USFA management in the future.

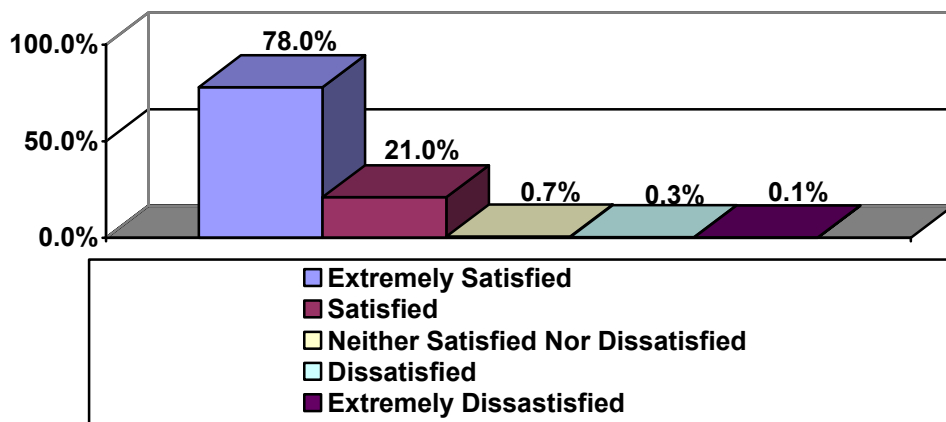
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Customer Service/Satisfaction

Overall customer service satisfaction scores for the Program were extremely high. A full 99% of respondents were satisfied with the AFG Program's ability to meet the needs of their departments. A closer look showed that these scores were supported by high rankings for the notification and application process, as well as for technical support provided via the help desk, e-mail and the web.

How satisfied are you with the 2001 AFG Program's ability to meet the needs of your department?

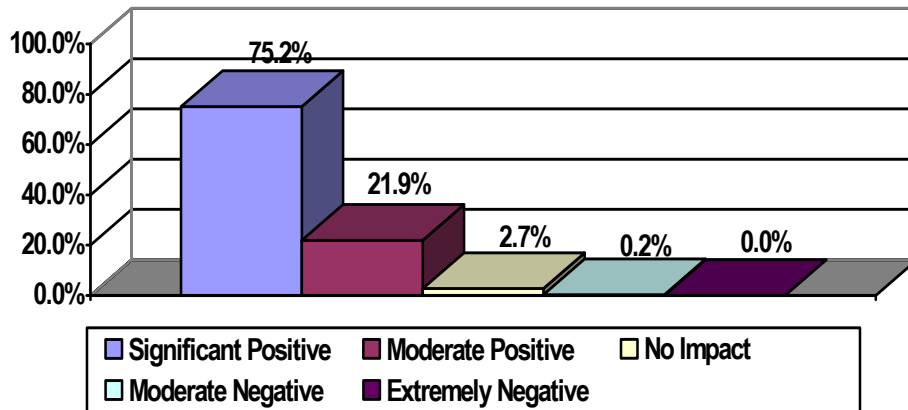
Table 3: Satisfaction with 2001 AFG Program



While the vast majority of respondents (75%) indicated that they did not need training to better understand the grant process, a significant portion (25%) felt that training would be helpful. In order to ensure that the process is clearly understood by all applicants, additional training might be a consideration for FEMA in the future.

Most meaningful of all the findings was the reported impact on fire fighting capability. **Slightly more than 97% of the respondents reported that the AFG Program had a positive impact on their department's ability to handle fire or fire-related incidents.** Slightly more than 75% reported this impact to be significant.

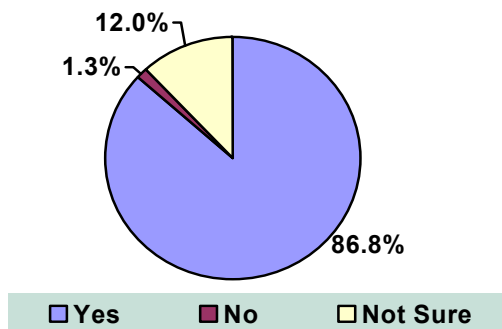
Table 4: Impact on Your Department's Ability To Handle Fire/Fire-Related Incidents



This data is particularly relevant as it relates to FEMA strategic goals and the specific aims of this Program (see attached chart).

Do you believe the AFG Program is assisting the USFA in the achievement of these goals?

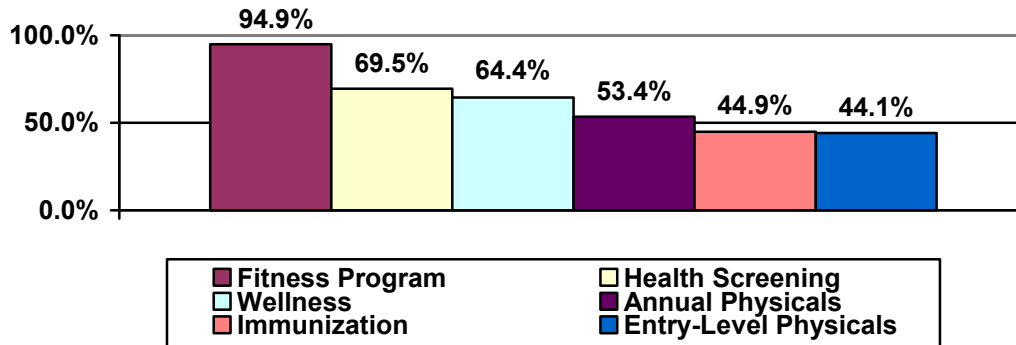
Table 5: The AFG Program Assists the USFA in Achieving Goals



Wellness

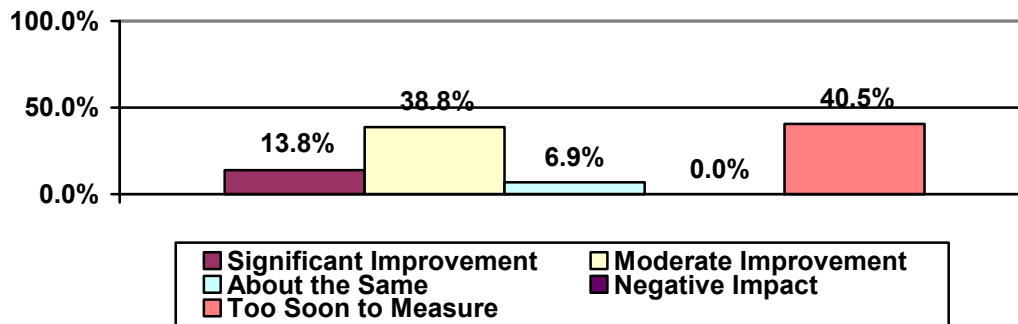
Of the 116 departments responding in this category, close to 95% implemented fitness programs as a result of the funds provided. A breakdown of total programs/activities implemented is as follows:

Table 6: Activities Implemented/Planned Using Grant Funding



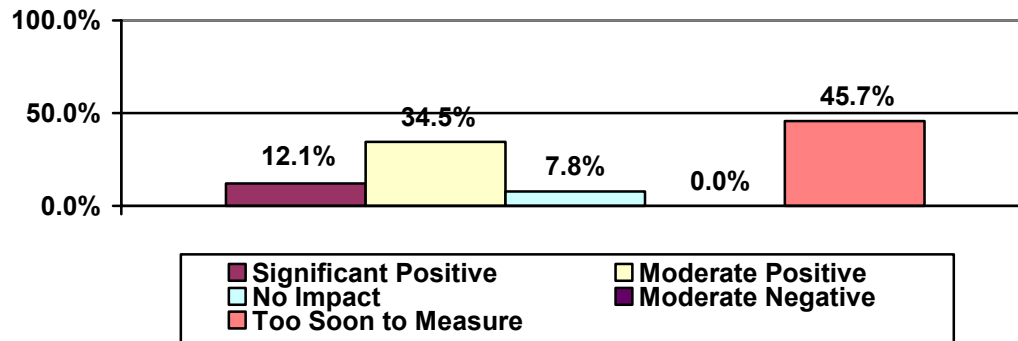
While many of the respondents to this section felt it was too soon to measure the impact of these new programs, others did report positive findings. **Over 88% of departments that were able to measure a change indicated an improvement in the health and shape of their firefighters and a reduction in illnesses and sick days.**

Table 7: Fewer Illnesses/Sick Days as a Result of Program



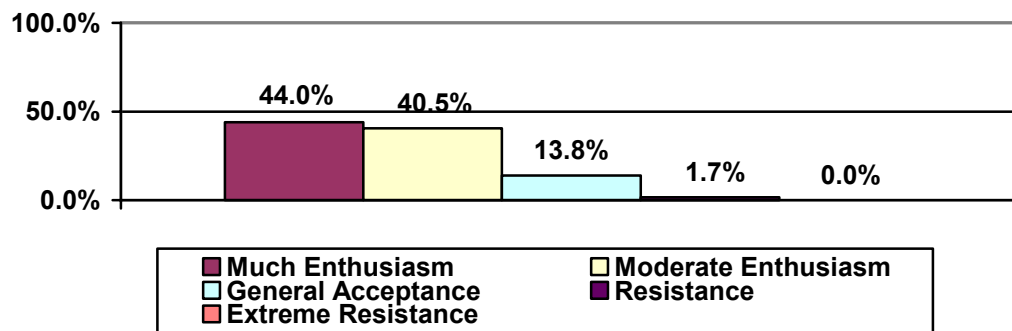
Close to 86% of respondents with sufficient program operating time to measure impact, indicated that the AFG Program reduced injuries to firefighters in their departments (see attached chart).

Table 8: Impact on Reducing Injuries to Firefighters in Your Department



Close to 80% of the departments responding indicated that they had employee assistance or chaplain services available to firefighters. Overall, 85% of departments described firefighter response to the Program as enthusiastic (see attached chart).

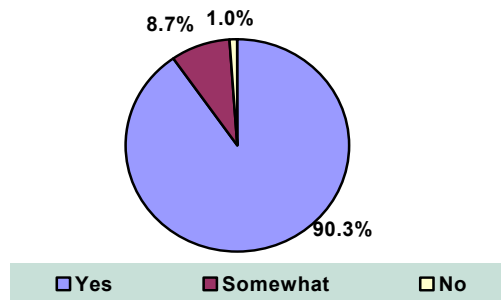
Table 9: Firefighters' Response to the AFG Program



Training

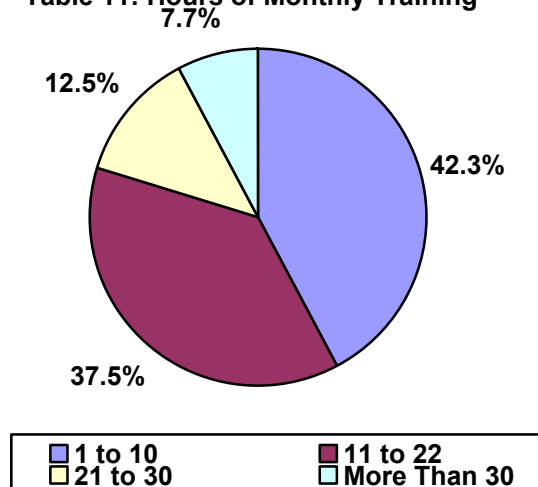
Training questions were answered by 103 fire departments. As in other sections, responses were positive. Findings indicate that, as a result of training grants provided, 99% of respondents will be able to present initial and/or regular in-service training to their firefighters. **As a result of training provided by the Program, over 90% of the respondents felt their department operated more efficiently and more safely.**

Table 10: Improved Efficiency and Safety as a Result of Training



Average reported hours of monthly training provided as a result of funding are as follows:

Table 11: Hours of Monthly Training

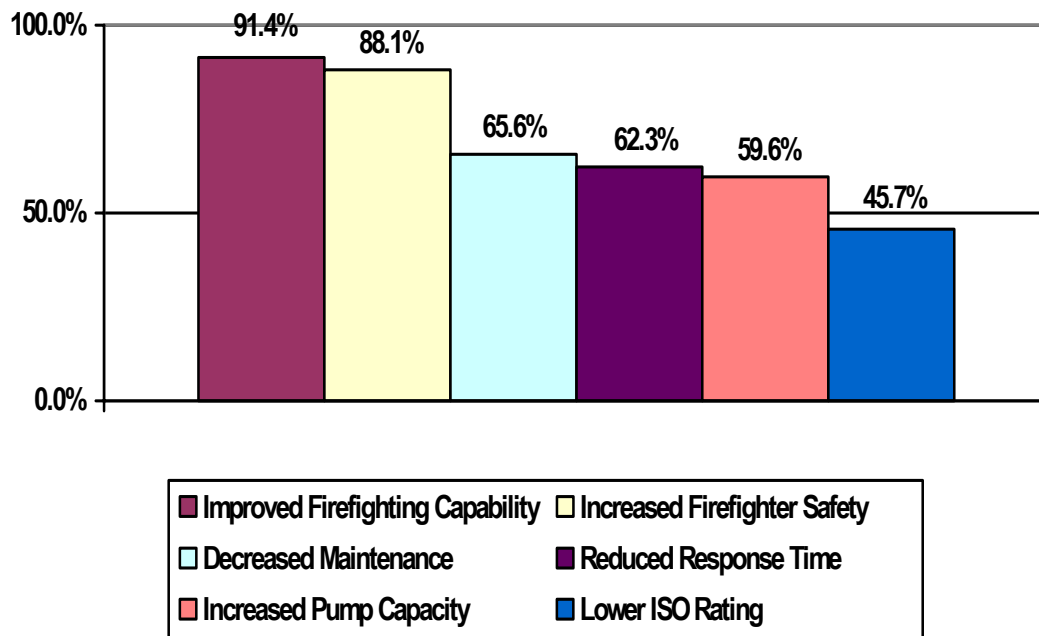


Vehicles

A total of 139 departments responded in this grant category. The qualitative results reflect the following:

What benefits do you expect to gain with this grant?

Table 12: Benefits Gained Through Grant



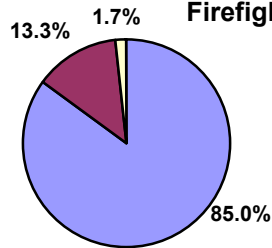
Currently 91% indicate improved firefighting capability.

Firefighting Equipment

Responses to survey questions in this section reflected positive perceptions of funding impact on both operational capability and firefighter safety. **Improvements in operational capacity were cited by 98% of responding departments** (close to 85% of respondents reported these improvements as significant). **Among responding departments, 99% reported improvements in the safety of firefighters during emergency operations** (see attached charts).

With the grant that your department received, which of the following best describes your department's operational capacity for firefighting?

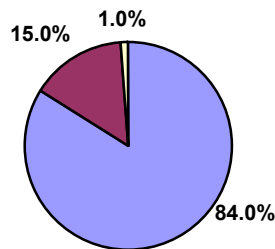
Table 13: Effect of Grant on Operational Capability for Firefighting



■ Significant Improvement ■ Marginal Improvement ■ No Improvement

As a result of receiving funding for firefighting equipment, which of the following best describes the safety of your firefighters during emergency operations?

Table 14: Safety of Firefighters During Emergency Operations



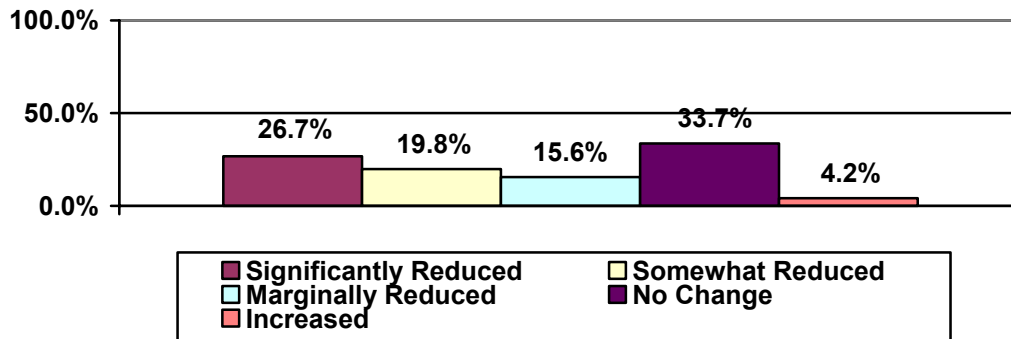
■ Significant Improvement ■ Marginal Improvement ■ No Improvement

Protective Equipment

Almost 62 % of the respondents indicated that injuries were *reduced* since receiving the new equipment. About 34% indicated that there had been no change. Narrative comments submitted with the survey responses indicate that some delays occurred in implementing their new personal protective equipment and that may account for the remainder of responses.

Which of the following best describes your department's experience with injuries (e.g., cuts, burns) during firefighting operations since receiving the new equipment?

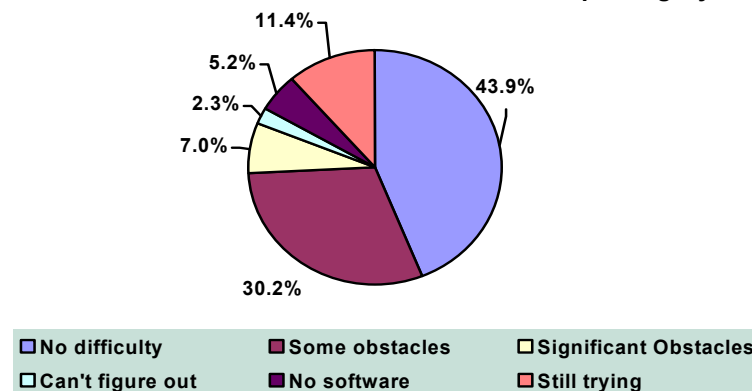
Table 15: Firefighting Injuries Since Receiving New Equipment



National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS)

In response to an additional survey question regarding the use of the National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), more than half of the respondents reported some difficulty in the attempts to comply.

Table 16: Use of the National Fire Incident Reporting System



SUMMARY OF NARRATIVE SURVEY COMMENTS

Of the 999 respondents to the online survey, almost 550 (55%) provided narrative comments. In general, the comments were overwhelming positive. Many of the responding departments detailed the difficulty experienced in raising funds locally to purchase “newer, used” equipment to support their departments (source?). The grant program provided fire departments with the resources needed to secure equipment and training, which would not otherwise have been possible.

Repeatedly, there were examples of how firefighter safety and morale had improved due to the funding provided to recipients. The gratitude expressed by the leaders within those communities included praise to FEMA for their efforts to get this program off the ground and to distribute funding to those departments in need of resources.

In most cases, the equipment purchased had already paid dividends within the department. On numerous occasions, recipients were able to replace 20 plus year old equipment with newer or brand new equipment to increase the capabilities of the staff in handling fire or fire-related incidents. Recipients within the wellness and training categories seemed especially appreciative for the grant funding. Most noted that without the AFG Program, the possibility of implementing programs within this category on their own would have been slim to none.

Although a majority of the narrative comments received were positive in nature, some suggestions submitted through this process provided valuable insight from the recipient’s perspective. For example, the cost share requirement based on population was difficult for smaller communities to manage.

Several respondents noted a need for a clearer understanding of the scoring guidelines and evaluation criteria. The basis for this suggestion seemed to be a lack of understanding of the USFA’s baseline for determining need. Without this information, departments cannot determine from which category they may have the best chance of receiving funding. However, grant applicants can more readily critique options and focus on those areas FEMA determines to be most important in determining eligibility.

With these minor exceptions, most respondents had only positive feedback for FEMA and USFA. It’s clear from these comments that the AFG program was sorely needed and should continue to be expanded during the coming years to ensure the needs of the fire fighting community are met.

Samples of Positive Comments Received

“I appreciate the opportunity to be allowed to apply for grants through USFA. The grants I received for protective equipment was immediately used and has made a significant improvement in firefighter safety. Our facilities and equipment are open for visitation at any time.”

“We received a "9" fire rating from Idaho Rating Bureau for a 10 mi. radius at our first Fire Station. This would not have been possible w/out FEMA Grant.”

“Because of the additional equipment received, we will be going for our ISO rating reduction to a 6 from a 7/9. Thank you for your support. This has been a 3 year project to complete.”

“The Route 377 Volunteer Fire Department would welcome a visit from FEMA. We are proud of the equipment purchased to protect our volunteers. The structural Gear and Wildland Gear with Fire Shelters will greatly improve our ability to function safely on the fire ground. The equipment purchased may have never been a reality without the Fire Act.”

“The grant received has made a boost in Company moral. We are currently receiving the rest of our gear and plans were made for a company picture with the fire gear provided by the FEMA grant for 2001. The ease of applying and the help provided was overwhelming and made everything that much more easy for our company when applying. We hope everyone that applies for a grant will receive a grant in due time to help curve the cost of running a Fire Dept. while protecting the lives and property of the people in their community. For this I thank each and every one of you who made this program possible. Louis J Vasile, Chief Norma-Alliance Volunteer Fire & Rescue Company.”

“This may sound corny, but in a lot of ways our Department was like the household that had to decide every month if there was money to pay the bills, buy insurance, etc., and then see if there was anything left over to put food on the table and buy shoes for the kids. By being a successful 2001 Grant Applicant, we were able to lay in a supply of non-perishable food (equipment), buy the kids an extra pair of shoes (Foam, etc.) and even buy them a new Coat (Hydrant Tester, Hose Tester, etc.) to assure they stayed warm and safe. In essence, the Grant moved us up a rung or two on the economic ladder and significantly improved our Quality of Life (Proficiency and Training). We have been able to refocus much of our efforts from financial survival projects to training and improved proficiency, thus enhancing the Safety of our Personnel and providing a significantly improved Quality of Service to our Constituents. Thank You FEMA! I assure you that every penny of the Grant Monies was spent in accordance with the Program Objectives and you can be Proud of having selected us as a successful Grant Applicant. Lin Owen, Fire Grant Project Manager Secretary, Board of Directors Mountain Creek Volunteer Fire Department, Inc. 248 Godfrey Road Ellerbe, NC 28338 EMail: LINO@etinternet.net Phone: (910) 652-5265”

“Without this assistance, we would not have been able to provide proper, sufficient protective fire equipment for our members. Previous PPE was "haphazard", out of date and damaged. Members were not reliant on PPE for protection. This program, and the provision of PPE have overwhelmingly improved our capabilities. Members psychologically realize they are wearing the best, most technologically advanced PPE available. Their performance at scenes has demonstrated their confidence in their PPE. This program is a Godsend. Please continue and increase the money available. Chief Richard E. Voulez”

Samples of Comments Received Detailing Possible Areas for Improvement

“Our 20 year-old volunteer fire department is located in a rural Appalachian Mountain community that is characterized by a large area and a very small, well –dispersed population. We have no salaried employees and our fire company ranges in age from the young to mature. We are supported by public donations, fund raising, and assistance from two county governments (who have their own revenue difficulties), and the United Way. Our “normal” annual budget approximates \$10,000 from all sources. Our fire station was built by the county government but is maintained by fire department. We are very grateful to FEMA to have been awarded a 2001 AFG grant because it allowed us to have a dependable, up to date fire truck that met NFPA standards. It was needed because it replaced a pumper that was well in excess of 40 years in age. The new truck has had a positive effect on public safety than previously existed and the grant has stimulated and increase in the new truck has been a very positive event in our community life. Obtaining the local funds to meet our share of the cost of the new fire engine was not without difficulty. We were aware of a need for new equipment and had been hording state awards for fire premiums funds for several years with the goal of replacing our old fire truck. The trade in value of the old unit was very small and our best hope was to accumulate sufficient funds to buy a newer, used truck. In retrospect and considering the acceleration of costs for fire equipment, the potential to obtain even much newer used equipment would be a VERY long-term project. We were able to meet our share of the project funds by special assistance from one of the counties, exhausting all of our savings for a newer unit, personal contributions, deferring building maintenance and equipment purchases, and dipping significantly into operating budget funds. We have now recovered from the borrowing of funds that had been dedicated to operations, building and equipment maintenance but the chances for additional purchases of significant equipment remains a future action. Our fortune is receiving the grant for a new truck is much appreciated by the community but it was not without budget stress to the fire department. We are sure that we are not unique in this type of challenge and it may be typical of rural volunteer fire departments across the USA. There may a need to further consider the budget of the grant recipient, to further extend what you have done in the 2002 grant program, because there is difficulty for small departments to comfortably meet a 10 percent share of a large item such as a fire truck.”

“I have answered no to question 24 because during normal hours there is no one at our station. Grant support was always quick with an answer to all of our questions. The grant has been great for our department. The grant process was easy to follow and complete. If I had any suggestions, it would be to provide as much information as you can on the scoring guidelines. For instance, if there is no reason for me to apply for a truck if my oldest one is only 20 years old, tell me. Keep the rules and guidelines as simple as possible to give a small department like mine as much an opportunity to compete with larger departments. Please don’t penalize me for having two old trucks (falling apart) instead of one. Just because we have scraped together equipment does not mean our need is any less. Otherwise, the lesson is to get rid of redundant items so as to better qualify for a grant. Again - overall the grant process has been great and it shows the work that USFA

and FEMA put into making it a success. Thank you, Malcolm Cunningham Chief - Hardin Fire Prot District Hardin, Missouri.”

“Our grant project involves the purchase of a mobile burn simulator. The project involved a lengthy research and specification development process; therefore, we have yet to complete the project. We requested and were granted an extension of time. The burn simulator should be delivered by the manufacturer this week; project closeout will follow soon after. Suggestion: I believe the grant match criteria (i.e. population/percentage match formula) should be re-evaluated. A 30% match for our dept. is extremely difficult and prohibits us from pursuing more effective grant opportunities. The match criteria should consider other factors such as: local economic conditions, ongoing disaster recovery, etc. For example; Eastern NC municipalities are still suffering severe economic and budgetary problems attributed to Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Just because our population is 60K, that is not a true indication of our ability to fund a 30% match. The process should allow applicants the opportunity to further justify their economic positions.”

“I feel the small rural departments should have more opportunity to receive funds. Example, city of Seattle, Washington, received \$660,000.00 this time. They spend more on tires than most rural departments receive all year in general funds. There are several departments that cannot even match the 10%. These departments cannot even afford good equipment, much less top of the line thermal imaging cameras. James Straw District Chief East Pulaski County FD.”

“The problem I had with the help center was they only answered questions that were on the frequently asked questions list. They provided no other information. While we are supposed to report to NFIRS, I don't have any idea how I am supposed to accomplish this. The notification process in 2001 worked fairly well. It seems as though FEMA was notifying departments in sections. I like that way better than the way it is happening in 2002. I know that the grant is set up somewhat differently, but it seems to me like FEMA could go ahead and notify the departments they know will not get anything. Even with the few problems I have encountered, I found this to be a fairly well run process. I feel as though FEMA has tried to keep politics out of it and am grateful for that.”

“This being the first year of the grant, as a recipient I think it went very well. There was some confusion in the notification process but other than that we were very pleased. The communications on the 2002 Grant is not as good as the 2001 procedures. It is difficult for agencies to budget matching funds if in reality they will not receive a grant. The on-line application was somewhat confusing however, I am sure this will improve in the future. Keep up the good work.”

“We have had a hard time getting the balance of our funds and believe that you should have offered more grant writing classes.”

Team Site Visits and Grant Recipient Feedback

The EPP Team performed a site-visit to some of the FY 2001 USFA Grant to Firefighter recipients to complement the data derived from the survey instrument and comments.

The locations visited were:

- Alpine Fire Protection District, Alpine, California
- Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department, Raleigh, North Carolina
- Cardington Stone Hurst Fire Department, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania
- City of Encinitas Fire Department, Encinitas, California
- City of Santee Fire Department, Santee, California
- Tiburon Fire Protection District Disaster Response Unit, Tiburon, California

The following pages describe the feedback received from those sit visits.

Alpine Fire Protection District, Alpine, California

We met with Jean Moore, Finance/Administration Officer. Alpine is a small suburban and rural fire district. Alpine received a \$236,000 grant for a “Brush Rig” fire truck. They would not have been able to purchase this vehicle without the grant from FEMA.

Prior to the purchase of the brush rig the district had only a type one fire truck. They applied for the grant just after the “Viejas fire” one of the most devastating fires in history of San Diego county. During this fire there truck broke because it had to be operated off the road in rugged conditions. If they had had the Brush Rig truck the results of the fire would not have been so severe.



The District transferred money from their capital expense fund in order to meet the matching requirements. The District utilizes a former single family home as a Fire Station, part of which has had to be cut out in order to accommodate larger fire trucks. The focus of the District Board has been to save for new construction. While the need for this new Brush Rig was important the lack of physical space took priority. With a growing suburban population the District was able sell two pieces of property, purchase another site and use residual funds for the grant matching.



Ms. Moore wrote the grant herself as the District could not afford to hire a professional grant writer. She was recognized by the Alpine community for her efforts in securing this grant. She also received a special award from the California State Assembly for her efforts. The importance of this grant to the community has been published in the local media.



Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department, Raleigh, North Carolina

We spoke with Chief Ron Roof of the Bay Leaf Volunteer Fire Department. The Chief's position had just become a full time job last year. He wrote the grant himself. Bay Leaf covers an upscale suburban and rural part of the Raleigh area. The received a grant for personal protective gear. The department had all their firefighters measured and fitted for individual Self Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA).

Without the grant they would have had to continue to use generic small, medium, large sized masks. Without many fulltime firefighters these generic masks were stored on the fire trucks at each station or seat. Of course each station could not have three different sizes of masks stored there, so the firefighters had to wear whatever size was there. This could often result in a poor fitting mask. The SCBA has a positive air flow system, so that even with a poorly fitting mask they are still protected from smoke.



Chief Roof and EEP team 6 member, Mike Magee

But, with the positive flow air will blow by and out the mask reducing the time an air bottle lasts in a fire. A thirty minute air bottle could end up lasting only ten minutes. Now each firefighter has their own mask that they keep with them. This has improved moral and certainly improved firefighter confidence, because they know that a thirty minute air bottle will last.



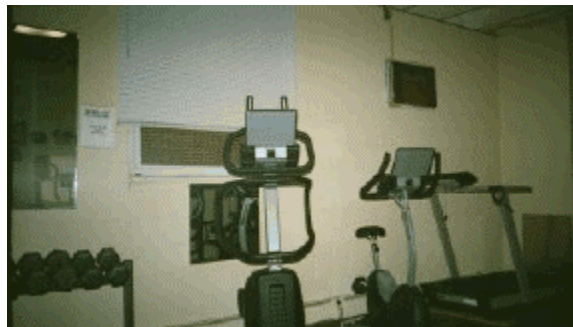
Chief Ron Roof proudly displays his new SCBA.

Cardington Stone Hurst Fire Department, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania

Our point of contact at the Cardington Stone Hurst Fire Department was Assistant Chief Richard Heffernan. They received a \$16,353 grant under the “Wellness and Fitness” category. The grant was used for two purposes. The first was for physical examinations for approximately 30 fire fighters including both full time professionals and volunteers who staff the Cardington Stone Hurst Fire Department. The examinations included various medical tests and associated lab work as required. Because of the high risk of coming into contact with victims injured from fires, many of the tests were for diseases transmitted through contact with blood such as HIV or hepatitis. As a result, the fire fighters who tested negative received vaccinations for hepatitis B.



The second portion of the grant money was utilized to upgrade and improve the fire department’s fitness program. This included the purchase of two pieces of exercise equipment: a stair stepper and a stationary bicycle.



During our discussions with Mr. Heffernan, he indicated that overall he was satisfied with the administration of the grant program, but did cite two issues that he thought needed attention. The first was the date that he received the survey. This was two weeks after the date indicated in the survey as the requested due date to respond. Of more concern was the second issue raised by Mr. Heffernan. He explained that when he applied for the grant he had to base the requested amount, in part, on his estimate of how many fire fighters would be examined and tested. At the conclusion of the examinations and tests he discovered that he had an excess in the amount of \$4,555. He contacted FEMA in an effort to return the unused money and discovered several obstacles. He was first asked to provide documentation that he did not accrue interest on the unused money.

In subsequent discussions, he was told something to the effect that the grant program "was not designed to take money back" and that he should "try to spend it". Mr. Heffernan did not have a reason to spend the money in 2002, but plans to make another application in 2003. This grant would be used for more physical examinations and physical fitness equipment that he did not previously anticipate a need for as well as other items now needed including a thermal imaging camera and fibulator.



He has recently been informed that the \$4,555 will be deducted from any grant money authorized in 2003. Mr. Heffernan would like FEMA to amend the grant program to put into place procedures to facilitate the return of unused funding when appropriate.

City of Encinitas Fire Department, Encinitas, California

We met with Fire Department Program Analysis Tom Gallup. Encinitas is medium size city that has grown rapidly since it incorporated in 1986. They received a grant to purchase a confined space and trench rescue trailer containing all the gear necessary to affect those types of rescues.



Although they have not yet had a collapse of a confined work area within a building or a trench collapse, the fire department does services several water and sewer districts within the city.

Also, power and cable companies trench and tunnel within the city. This is California with the possibility of earthquakes.



Because the water and sewage districts' (independent governmental entities) employees would be the most likely to need a rescue from a confined space or trench the city staff approached the districts for support in funding the non-federal required matching funds. The Districts did share in the funding and are recognized for that assistance by having their logos displayed on the trailer.



Mr. Gallop wrote the grant application himself. He also stated that process of working collaboratively with other governmental bodies in order to obtain the funding was valuable in its self. They now work on all levels with these others District, which they did not do prior to applying for the grant.

City of Santee Fire Department, Santee, California

We met with Senior Program Analysts Jim Stoner and Assistant Chief Covington. Santee is a medium size suburban community. They received two grants, one for equipment for the city fire department and the second for personal protective gear for the joint Lakeside Santee Paramedic District. They purchased state of the art internal helmet microphones with the grant. The microphone actually sits on top of the firefighter's head. The sound is transmitted though the bone in the firefighter's skull. This eliminates most outside sound. With this new microphone you could be operating noisy equipment such as a chain saw and still be able to communicate with other firefighters. This equipment improves officer safety and moral.



The paramedic district purchased fire resistant and blood borne pathogen resistant jackets. Prior to receiving these jackets paramedics wore "turnout coats", the large smoke stained heavy traditional fire coats. The new jackets are more comfortable and presentable for use on paramedic calls that don't have an imminent danger of fire. Without the grant the jackets would have purchased piecemeal over the next several years.



Mr. Stoner wrote the grant application himself and the city council voted to use reserve funds for the matching share.

Tiburon Fire Protection District Disaster Response Unit, Tiburon, California



We met with the Chief, he said a person from the FEMA Region 9 office was just out there to do a review of their grant. Tiburon received \$125,000 for Firefighting Equipment. This vehicle is the result of a 3-year project to improve the overall response capability of the Tiburon Fire District to local and regional disasters. This equipment, coupled with improved training for all Department Personnel, will provide the communities of Tiburon, Belvedere and surrounding areas with the tools and technology necessary during times of disaster.



The fire stations in Petaluma and Sonoma received grant money for training activities. Petaluma used their money to buy a PowerPoint machine and Sonoma hired a training officer with the funds. One frequent comment made by all the stations regarding the application process was the procedure used in the award and funding decisions. For example, other fire stations in the Tiburon area also applied for the grant money but were not selected for any awards. In response to this, the Tiburon station recently had a workshop where they shared with everyone **HOW** they filled out their application. So, all the stations support more training in the grant application process or more clarity on

how they can be deemed to be in the "competitive range" so they can advance to the second level of review. With large deficits in state and city budgets, many of the fire stations are undergoing major funding cuts and need the grant money. They questioned, "if you get grant money one year does that mean you will be bypassed the following year?"



Tools and Equipment carried:
Thermal Imaging Cameras
FEMA Disaster Cache (medium level)
Hydraulic Jack Hammer, Rotary Saw, Drill
High Output Cutting Torch
Confined Space Rescue Equipment
Emergency Lighting & Generators
High Angle Rope Rescue Gear
Multi-Casualty Medical Equipment
Confined Space Rescue
Camera/Listening Device
Portable Saws, Drill, Cutters
Cribbing and Structural Stability Equipment
Portable Radio Equipment Cache
CERT Personnel Safety Equipment
Structural Evaluation Tools



FUNDING:

Funding for this Trailer and ALL Equipment was provided by the collective efforts of the following Organizations:

Tiburon Fire Protection District
Tiburon Volunteer Fire Department
Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
Belvedere Community Foundation
Tiburon Foundation

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon our experience in assessing the effectiveness of the grant program, the team has developed the following recommendations to FEMA Fire Administration about how they can further develop the grants application program and incorporate the survey feedback process.

- Additional training in the grant application process is recommended to ensure all eligible and interested parties are afforded the opportunity to submit a complete and comprehensive application.
- Consider seeking out those departments with survey responses that indicated a need for further training (if appropriate specific training could be offered via teleconference or other venue).
- Continue to survey program participants. Initial findings from grant recipients are extremely positive. Ongoing collection and analysis is likely to further support program goals and provide continued insight into fire department needs and program modification requirements.
- Review the matching funds requirements. Differing needs and budgets among rural versus urban fire departments and large versus small may be placing undue burden on some departments and could inhibit participation.
- Differing needs among rural versus urban fire departments may want to be reconsidered within the determining criteria and funds match requirements to ensure equity in evaluation of needs.
- Consider directing funds toward programs/equipment that will assist in bringing more stations into compliance.
- Consider further research on those respondents that indicated the grant funding did not impact their department.

CONCLUSIONS

While our assessment focused on 2001 recipients, the USFA has already taken significant steps to improve the grant program's effectiveness by automating the application process and revising the framework for developing grant proposals for FY 2002 and beyond. We applaud those initiatives and encourage the agency to consider our recommendations and embrace the concept of continuous improvement as they continue to administer this program in the coming years.

Our overall conclusions for the entire project are:

- The USFA Grants to Firefighters Program has been highly effective in increasing the safety and effectiveness of grant recipients in 6 major improvement areas:
 - Fire Prevention
 - Firefighting Equipment
 - Personal Protective Equipment
 - Firefighting Vehicles
 - Wellness & Fitness
 - Training
- There is an extremely high level of interest in the grant program by the firefighting community as evidenced by our overall 64% survey response rate and 35% comment rate.
- 99% of program participants are satisfied with the program's ability to meet the needs of their department.
- 97% of program participants reported positive impact on their ability to handle fire and fire-related incidents.
- Over 88% of the participants who were able to measure change at the time the survey was distributed reported improvement in the fitness and health of their firefighters as a result of the program and 86% indicated reduced injuries.
- 90% of the participants indicated that their department operated more efficiently and safely as a result of the training provided by the grant program.
- Of those recipients receiving firefighting equipment, 99% indicated improvements in the safety of firefighters and 98% indicated improvements in operational capacity.
- The survey technique, as employed by the project team, can be an effective tool for measuring the results of the grant program in the future and provides baseline data for the future.